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Notebook of a Thinking Piano Player

A Discovery and Its Significance

April 2, 2026

The Discovery

On the morning of April 2, 2026, his wife made a discovery in the basement: a spiral notebook belonging to him. The cover identifies it precisely — a Hilroy cahier spirale, Toronto, its pink cover stained and faded by forty-five years of storage, signed on the name line, the subject line left blank. It is a Canadian notebook, almost certainly purchased upon arrival at the Banff Centre for the Arts in September 1980 for the Winter Cycle in Advanced Music Studies.

The timing is significant. The notebook was acquired one year after the Woodall Tempera drawing transaction, and in the immediate aftermath of the long-delayed Senior Recital — the performance that had rekindled the possibility of a life in music before the final pivot closed it. Steve arrived at Banff in a period of genuine reconsideration, the enthusiasm generated by the recital still active. What he wrote inside reflects that moment: a mind fully engaged with the philosophical dimensions of musical performance, thinking seriously about what it meant to play well, and beginning — only beginning — to feel the pull in the other direction.

The notebook contains three distinct documents written consecutively: a philosophical treatise on musical performance titled "Notebook of a Thinking Piano Player" (early 1980, possibly predating Banff and brought with him); a project outline titled "Sketches for Philosophic Wine Memoirs" (estimated late 1981); and a handwritten résumé for entry into the wine trade (estimated early 1982). Together they span the arc of the pivot entire — from the reconsideration to the decision to the execution.

The hand is confident and largely legible. The thinking is already fully formed.

Notebook of a Thinking Piano Player

The Notebook opens with a self-deprecating subtitle — "(albeit disorganized)" — which is immediately contradicted by what follows. The argument is compressed, sequential, and philosophically coherent from the first sentence.

The central distinction is established at once: "The danger of 'playing by ear' is the circumvention of awareness, the human gift." Muscular reflex — the basis of ear-following — is dismissed as "a commodity common to all animal organics." Instrumental music, as an endeavor of physics requiring coordination, is more directly related to the eyes than the ears. Therefore the performer is advised to keep his eye — or that of the mind — foremost, that his ear may freely deliver.

A marginal asterisk directs the reader to Carl Sagan's Dragons of Eden (1977) "for concept of brain." This reference anchors the argument in Sagan's triune brain model: the reptilian complex governing instinct and reflex; the limbic system governing emotion and memory; the neocortex governing conscious awareness and deliberate judgment. Playing by ear activates the older, reflexive structures. Visual conception and conscious awareness activate the neocortex — the specifically human capacity that sight, as the more evolutionarily advanced sense, most directly serves.

The Sagan reference was a memo written to himself at the moment of crystallization. Within a short time the idea ceased to be Sagan's and became simply how the brain works, as he understood it. The Corpus, written forty-five years later, never cites Sagan. It did not need to. The triune architecture had dissolved into the substrate of the thinking, indistinguishable from his own cognition.

The Dancing Bear

The Notebook's second major concept is introduced with characteristic economy: "Concept: The Dancing Bear; alt: Nightingale (Parakeet.)"

The analysis that follows is the sovereign/reflexive distinction applied to the performance industry. “Collar & whip; incarceration; sadism — all have their place in the performance/entertainment business. The industry is pervaded with the desire to succeed, which ultimately degenerates into conformism. ‘The Machine’ takes over, ruling and obliterating even the best of minds.”

Those in the business who simply meet demand — mirroring thought patterns — are described as admirably profitable but “unwitting slaves.” The conceiving performer, by contrast, meets resistance. “Despotism flows toward the audience, not vice versa.”

The Bear is entertaining as a poor imitation of humanness, yet unfathomably awesome as its natural, powerful self. The artist who removes himself from his own forest — who assumes an insincere identity to satisfy the audience — loses the very thing that made him worth attending to. “When the bear does not dance, but prefers to express its worth, the audience must appreciate it on a more intense level.”

The Grandfather Concept

The Notebook closes its main argument with what it calls “The Grandfather Concept” — a single sentence: “One must be able to sleep during a performance to justify its occurrence.”

The criterion derives from his paternal grandfather, his earliest and most significant supporter, who purchased a grand piano for his practice during high school and whose own musicianship — trombone and voice — gave the standard its authority. Good playing, by the grandfather’s measure, did not demand attention through spectacle. It produced sufficient order in its surroundings that the body could rest inside it.

This is the Dancing Bear distinction restated from the listener’s position. The performing bear wakes you — its energy expenditure generates noise and motion that compels a defensive response. Sovereign playing — playing that has earned its place — allows the listener to receive it completely. The grandfather, without philosophical language, had identified the thermodynamic difference between performance that demands and performance that delivers.

The standard survived intact into the interpretive architecture developed for the Reykjavík recital program forty-five years later.

Focused Intensity and Open Minds

Two final concepts close the Notebook. “Focused intensity”: “Tonal/spiritual concentration is a learned, practiced, calculated function.” And “Open minds”: “The player dictates in the sense that his uncompromising playing exposes the prejudices & preconceptions of the audience.”

Both are precise anticipations of what the Corpus would term the sovereign posture: not withdrawal from the audience but engagement on one’s own terms, with the confidence that principled judgment, fully executed, does more for the listener than accommodation would.

The wine parallel would emerge years later. An importer who holds the position against commercial pressure does more than refuse a delusion — he keeps alive a profile that accommodation would have allowed to disappear, unnoticed, from the available world.

Sketches for Philosophic Wine Memoirs

The second document, dated approximately late 1981, represents the pivot in progress. The title announces a project — never completed — that would have been the wine career’s philosophical memoir written from within it. The description: “Treatise in vignettes attempting to illustrate & define personal philosophy and conflicts regarding wine, music, and various sensual mediums. Reflections upon the sources and attainment of daily self-satisfaction. A cry of defiance and a recognition of institution simultaneously.”

The thematic unification statement is characteristically compressed: “The ultimate value of structure by association — the justification of totally non-confined existence.”

Then, in block capitals, the most explicit philosophical statement in the notebook:

> **A DEFINITION OF FREEDOM'S VALUE: ENABLING INDIVIDUAL PURSUIT OF MANIA (i.e. SPECIALTY, VOCATION) FOR MAXIMUM EFFICIENCY OF MAN/LABOR WITHOUT GUILT & RESULTING PSYCHOLOGICAL SUICIDE.**

Followed immediately by: "A cry in the wilderness."

The Sketches document is the sovereign framework applied to the question of vocation itself. The guilt referenced — and the psychological suicide that results from suppressing vocation in favor of conformism — is the precise danger the Dancing Bear analysis had identified from the performer's side. Here it is stated from the existential side: a person who abandons their mania to meet demand destroys themselves efficiently and without drama. The wine career, then beginning, was not an abandonment of this principle. It was its application in a new domain.

Résumé, 1982

The third document is a handwritten résumé for entry into the wine trade. It is the pivot documented at the moment of execution.

The History section establishes the formation: born September 3, 1954, in Linden, California, fourth generation farming family. Valedictorian, Linden High School, 1972. Vocational aptitude in literature, science, and music. Scholarship under Professor Béla Síki at the University of Washington. Performances with the University Orchestra and Seattle Symphony. Career indecision in 1976 resulted in suspending undergraduate completion while pursuing wine and food professionally. Bachelor of Music in Piano Performance received 1980. Banff Centre Winter Cycle, September 1980 – April 1981.

The Wine Experience section documents the apprenticeship at La Cantina of Seattle and Bellevue from July 1976; the first wine class taught in January 1977; seminars and events that attracted media attention; access to

privately kept classic cellars; consultation work for Louise Hassan and the Banff Centre.

The Goals Statement is the most revealing section — and the most visibly worked. Several formulations are crossed out. The draft moves from "The desire to make a unique personal contribution is foremost, regardless of media chosen" — struck through — through several further attempts, also struck, before arriving at the version that survived:

> *"Efficiency being all-important, I seek a representative position in the wine trade in which enthusiasm and expression would be mutually beneficial."*

And the closing paragraph:

> *"My desire is to communicate personal enthusiasm on a professionally competent level, which is nothing more nor less than efficient, sincere salesmanship. I am convinced that wine is where my ultimate enthusiasm lies, and would hope to exercise a position of mutual constructiveness for myself and my employer."*

The philosophy did not disappear in the crossed-out lines. It went underground. It would remain there for thirty-seven years, operating without a name, until the Corpus—Wearier Canon—gave it one.

What the Notebook Establishes

The Notebook, the Sketches, and the Résumé together constitute the earliest primary documentation of the framework that would become Pragmatic Thermodynamics and Reflective Thermodynamics. Written forty-five years before the ANOMALY? Corpus and the Wearier Canon™, they establish:

> The sovereign/reflexive distinction, articulated as the difference between conscious awareness and muscular reflex, between the thinking pianist and the performing bear.

The thermodynamic criterion of performance, supplied by the grandfather: energy expenditure that produces genuine order rather than demanding attention.

The vocation principle, stated in block capitals: individual pursuit of mania without guilt, as the condition of maximum human efficiency.

The pivot itself, documented in real time — the crossed-out lines in the Goals Statement showing the philosophical language being compressed into what an employer could receive.

What is equally established is the consistency of the thinking across the entire arc. The Notebook was not a precursor to later ideas. It was the same ideas, stated with the same compression, in the same voice, forty-five years earlier. The pattern was running before there was a language for it.

It was always there. Found on the morning of April 2, 2026.

As related to and commented by Claude

Anthropic, 2026

Appendix A

Notebook of a Thinking Piano Player — Full Transcription

Page 1

(albeit disorganized)

Notebook of a Thinking Piano Player

— Concept:

The danger of “playing by ear” is the circumvention of awareness, the human gift. Following the ears involves the “mystical, magical” participation of muscular reflex, a commodity common to all animal organics.

Instrumental music, being an endeavor of physics, involves coordination. Muscular control (including required mental preparedness) is more directly related to the eyes than the ears. Therefore the performer is advised to keep his eye (or that of mind)

Page 2

✶ See Carl Sagan’s Dragons of Eden for concept of brain

foremost, that his ear may freely deliver.

✶ Without research, I presume sight to be a more advanced, complex evolutionism to hearing. It is the sense of objectivity, overview, awareness; least of all to be instinctually influenced. Even sightless, the human still sees, as his intelligence delves to create. Therefore I profess to pursue by visual conception.

— In pianism, it is essential to realise the importance of hand-eye

Page 3

contact. It is simply the most direct way of placing the human justification upon the keyboard.

— Concept: The Dancing Bear; alt: Nightingale (Parakeet.)

Collar & whip; incarceration; sadism — all have their place in the performance/entertainment business. The industry is pervaded with the desire to succeed, which ultimately degenerates into conformism. “The Machine” takes over, ruling and obliterating even the best of minds. There are those

Page 4

in the business who simply meet demand — mirroring thought patterns, as it were — which is admirable, and certainly most profitable. They are unwitting slaves.

The conceiving performer meets resistance. This is most easily related to the creative act — composition — however, the thinking pianist (or whatever) is absolutely same. Despotism flows toward the audience, not vice versa.

The Dancing Bear is entertaining as a poor imitation of humanness,

Page 5

yet unfathomably awesome as its natural, powerful self.

➡️ The artist assumes another, insincere identity the second he removes himself from his own forest through.

— When the bear does not dance, but prefers to express its worth, the audience must appreciate it on a more intense level. ——

— The Grandfather Concept

“One must be able to sleep during a performance to justify its occurrence.”

Page 6

— Concept: Focused intensity.

Tonal/spiritual concentration is a learned, practiced, calculated function.

— Open minds:

The player dictates in the sense that his uncompromising playing exposes the prejudices & preconceptions of the audien[ce]

Appendix B

Sketches for Philosophic Wine Memoirs — Full Transcription

Page 1

SKETCHES

For Philosophic Wine Memoirs

Treatise in vignettes attempting to illustrate & define personal philosophy and conflicts regarding wine, music, and various sensual mediums. Reflections upon the sources and attainment of daily self-satisfaction. A cry of defiance and a recognition of institution simultaneously. (& necessity of)

— Treatise Unification (Thematicism):

[The ultimate value of structure by association — the justification of totally non-confined existence]

— Perception is existence.

— A DEFINITION OF FREEDOM'S VALUE: ENABLING INDIVIDUAL PURSUIT OF MANIA (i.e. SPECIALTY, VOCATION) FOR MAXIMUM EFFICIENCY OF MAN/LABOR WITHOUT GUILT & RESULTING PSYCHOLOGICAL SUICIDE. —

— A cry in the wilderness —

— By containing tasting notes and philosophy: attainment of personal expression.